

INTRODUCTION

The European Curriculum: restructuring and renewal

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Curriculum and New Policy Steering

This special issue of *EERJ* focuses on current processes and programmes of curriculum reform as a key problem in understanding knowledge formation and education policy steering in Europe. After a long dominance of national reform efforts and decentralised decision making, Europeanisation and cross-national comparisons are becoming more central in national educational policy agendas. Indeed, the dominance of the knowledge economy paradigm as an organising policy principle for education has been accentuated – first, through a new mechanism of educational policy steering including, for example, technologies of governance such as the Bologna Process and, second, through an increased use of educational research, based on systematic comparison of performance (e.g. Programme of International Student Assessment, PISA) and of institutional features (e.g. Education at a Glance) to improve educational policy.

The notion of Europeanisation derives from contemporary research on educational governance, where policy implications are temporarily and spatially formed through expert networks and the flow of knowledge (Grek & Lawn, 2009; Ozga et al, 2011; Lawn & Grek, 2012). In addition, research on globalisation highlights the institutional power of global world-societies, the use of language in evaluation, and scientification of reform (Drori et al, 2003; Rosenmund, 2006; Lundahl & Waldow, 2009). However, formal curricula and their associated pedagogic practices remain largely under-researched as elements in the shaping and governing of education across Europe. This special issue brings together articles for the 2012 *Open Call on the European Curriculum: restructuring and renewal*, which share the notion of transmuting models within the field of curriculum and reform.

By addressing a wide variety of areas and contexts, the articles in this special issue problematise how curriculum is expressing itself, explicitly or implicitly, through Europeanisation processes. Several articles discuss how European-wide standards are created and applied in national and local curriculum contexts. In addition, some articles analyse how knowledge is transferred and translated through Europeanisation processes, while others examine how new curriculum

frameworks, partly formed through expert networks, connect with professional semantics about the 'what', 'how' and 'why' of teaching.

Although it seems that curriculum as a research and policy field is partly challenged by new evaluation policy and standards-based reform, the articles within this special issue do not conclude that the field of curriculum is past its best or losing its relevance. Rather they envision curriculum both as a viable idea for educational renewal and as a restructuring power, as a response to contemporary demands on the international policy agenda. In the following we will give a short introduction to the main topics and arguments presented by the authors, which bring new light to the contemporary status of curriculum reform across European countries. Finally, we hope that this special issue will benefit European educational research and mobilise discourses around curriculum and reform.

Europe-wide Standards and the Formal Curriculum

Curriculum has been implicitly addressed in formal and substantive decisions and policy initiatives, such as the Lisbon Agenda, the Bologna Process and PISA. Governing tools, such as agreements, programmes and frameworks, assume that national governments adjust their policy strategies to new terminology, associated with overall goals and standards. Within this area, the European Union (EU) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) promote a restructuring of horizons of expectations to the member countries and partners.

Frameworks such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, and Assessment' (CEFR) are influential within Europeanisation processes across disciplines. In this case, the Council of Europe (2007) is offering extra material and learning sources to renew assessment in language teaching. Meta-frameworks, such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), launched by the EU, provide references to align study courses with criteria for assessment. Officially, the intention is not to reform curriculum decisions, but to work as a 'translation device to make national qualifications more readable across Europe' (European Commission, 2012). Beyond this, a restructuring idea comes into effect, namely, a qualification system which calls for new certification systems, tests and inspection.

The EQF corresponds to the former and existing agreement in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) initiated in 1999, and proposes a parallel standard-set as a basis for organising study courses across Europe. Research findings indicate that these frameworks have a certain impact on curriculum matters, nationally and locally, within different fields and contexts, although they do not regulate nations and schools in any straightforward manner (Karseth & Solbrekke, 2010; Faber & Westerheijden, 2011).

A multitude of treaties, agreements and strategies, existing within the European policy and education space, steadily challenge nation-states and local institutions with new prospects to renew their education systems. As a result, the dissemination of institutional norms takes place, demanding a reconfiguration of study courses. Across Europe, national reform and/or research and development projects are launched, as institutional solutions towards supra-national initiatives and problems. Consequently, the converging trends toward a widespread use of generic terms have become more obvious in European and global conceptions of literacy and competence (UNESCO, 2005; OECD, 2006), and is questioned in contemporary research, which advocates a renewed focus on knowledge and education (Muller, 2000; Young, 2008; Yates & Young, 2010).

The interplay between international institutions and national or local constituencies is decisive for how global and European frameworks interact within curriculum and instruction. Relations are dependent not only on information transfer between policy contexts, but also on how conceptual overlaps and tensions are handled (Seddon, 2003; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). The course of this interplay is hardly predictable, although institutional patterns, materialised through formal curriculum documents, textbooks and examination systems, have a clear impact on decision making and outcomes. Such systems are structuring elements in curriculum history, and imply different conceptions of what a curriculum could mean in different contexts.

Due to the variation of curriculum-making traditions in Europe, the concept of curriculum has many connotations and meanings. In the Scandinavian context, national curriculum guidelines have been the norm for more than a century. Here, curriculum most often associates with a

national guideline about what to teach within and across school subjects for a particular stage. In Germany and Switzerland, curriculum making is a state and/or cantonal responsibility, involving professional institutions and councils in creating formal curricula which guide administrations and schools (Künzli et al, 1999). In the Netherlands curriculum is traditionally a local construction, whereby examinations function as the regulative tool for national government without a national curriculum framework (see Nieveen & Kuiper in this issue). Despite differences between the levels of responsibility in European countries/states, we might claim that across Europe, curriculum constitutes by tradition an institutional device for policy and teaching. It is most often conceptualised as an informative tool, which frames schools and teachers more indirectly than directly (Hopmann, 2003, 2007; Lundgren, 2009), focusing on mandates, contents and aims, rather than outcomes. Moreover, contrasting examples can be found in an American context, where assessment systems and outcomes are core elements in curriculum planning and development (Gundem & Hopmann, 1998).

In contemporary research, state-mandated curricula are considered to present 'authoritative statements about the social distribution of the knowledge, attitudes and competencies seen as appropriate to populations of students' (Westbury, 2007, p. 47), linking input and output perspectives (see also Rosenmund [2000] and Van den Akker [2010]). Moreover, contemporary reform implies an increased attention to predefined outcomes of learning and thereby converging standards across nations and continents. This leads to a mix of tools and conceptions, where the same curriculum is both a regulative and informative document on the one hand and a standardising output parameter on the other hand (Karseth & Sivesind, 2010).

In this special issue, Daniel Scholl identifies new trends and problems in developing standards-based curricula that focus on knowledge and learning outcomes. Based on documentary analysis of large-scale reform in a federal state in Germany, Scholl argues that curriculum is characterised by the complexity of the system it is part of, and for this reason, depends not only on its own rationale, but on poly-functional governing tools and programmes, like PISA. In order to systematise observations on the functionalities of the curriculum, Scholl offers an analytical framework which can be used in comparing different types of formal curricula. The first type, 'traditional curricula', includes professional semantics, which translates the ideas of 'Bildung' into a language for teaching, along with a German tradition. The second, 'essential curricula', expects nations and schools to deliver best practices, where the specification of achievement standards is directed toward output-oriented control, and with it, the ambitions for more effective schools. This last type exemplifies how a new language of curriculum is partly challenging and changing the model of curriculum reform in mainland Europe.

In this special issue, Sundberg and Wahlström also focus on how curriculum connects with evaluation and standards-based reform, implying decontextualised scripts for teaching. By comparing the 1991 reform and the new curriculum revised in 2011, Sundberg and Wahlström examine how Europeanisation, cross-national networking and comparisons influence reform work in Sweden. The authors report on transnational influences within the reform, locally expressed through dominant conceptions of knowledge, which are changing along with new approaches to national and international tests, inspections, reports and the involvement of experts.

Sundberg and Wahlström also show how knowledge is detailed through renewed focus on results in the contemporary reform from 2011, aligned with a new and extended law on schools, which potentially create leeway for experts to judge what counts as acceptable knowledge and quality in education. The result is not merely implementation or application of knowledge from the outside, but a process of recontextualisation and translation of standards-based scripts through curriculum reform. In this process, different initiatives interconnect, which force a denationalised and instrumental conception of education; however, not by reducing curricular purposes to the achievements of standards.

Nieveen and Kuiper's article on reform processes in the Netherlands describes how reform history is reconstructed along with changing regulations and demands that are not prescribed or detailed in any stage of the reform processes. The main aim is to disentangle, interpret and discuss the balancing act between curriculum regulation and freedom during the past 40 years within a wider European curriculum policy perspective. Against the background of a long-standing statutory tradition of educational freedom, the authors present how new institutions and agencies provide models for local work and site-specific choices through soft governance technology. In this

context, work on curriculum and evaluation is a balancing act, in both curriculum-making and implementation processes.

Curriculum between Institutions and Perceptions

So far, we can conclude that international programmes and frameworks do have a certain impact on new national/local reform curricula, e.g. by transforming education from a place for teaching into a space for learning (Seddon, 2003). On this basis, Lundgren (2009) distinguishes between levels and purposes of goals. Lundgren argues that to steer learning by goals is not the same as to steer systems by goals. Moreover, when new managerial approaches address the transformation of learning rather than systems, students are affected by educational policy in new ways.

Despite converging trends which centre on learning rather than the system and its services, curricula are not merely blueprints of the new European terminology but articulate their own concepts and approaches, transnationally as well as locally. Several authors conclude, as do Sundberg and Wahlström within this issue, that curriculum is much more than a simple implementation of new programmes and reform efforts delivered by European institutions and organisations.

Méhaut and Winch present in this special issue the overall ideas behind the EQF and the application of the framework in vocational education in the United Kingdom, France, Germany and the Netherlands. The authors examine and outline particular difficulties and tensions within the conceptual transformation of the terminology, which distinguishes between knowledge, skills and competence. The authors show how actors located in different countries perceive the framework differently in line with traditional models and local priorities. Difficulties of and tensions in implementing the framework can, according to the authors, partly be explained by paradoxical accounts within the framework itself. So far, processes of introducing the EQF do not substantiate evidence for shared perceptions of EU policy. Based on this, the authors question the potential of EQF and recommend revisions taking experiences from national and local reform processes seriously.

A similar study focuses on cross-disciplinary topics within EU policy and the way these topics are expressed within teacher training in Finland. According to Seikkula-Leino, Ruskovaara, Hannula and Saarivirta, there are several cross-disciplinary topics formulated as core aspects of EU policy, which are significant for the redesign of curriculum in the area of higher education. One relates to entrepreneurial skills, which are implemented in Finish teacher education, however differently, dependent on institutional processes and models. In vocational teacher education curricula, the focus on entrepreneurship has increased, while curricula for academic teacher education are not progressing toward a strengthened focus on entrepreneurial skills. Also, in the case of Finland, knowledge about reform is required to sustain changes that are initiated by the EU. Moreover, from the authors' perspective, there is a lack of support from the supranational level to create reform which involves new actors and partnerships.

The article by Leat, Thomas and Reid takes students' perspectives as the point of departure in studying the new competence-based model from a local perspective, as advocated by the EU. School students from England were interviewed about their accounts of traditional and competence based models within projects and their experiences with evaluation, along with strategies manifested through EU policy. The authors define a competence model as an expression of an experiential epistemology and enquiry-based learning, which is not apprehended along with overall goals, according to the students' perceptions of assessment systems and practices.

Global Scripts and Europeanisation through Expectations

Europeanisation processes might be well adjusted through local accomplishments and models, which are not primarily a question of policy implementation, but of a transnational knowledge discourse. As outlined by Mangez, the demand for knowledge within the new knowledge society is not simply to inform policy processes, but implies new forms of common regulation which are policy instruments in their own right (Mangez, 2010). Knowledge is translated within complex environments, and thus actors are expected to handle knowledge in flexible ways. Within this

perspective, the knowledge dimension is of core interest in reconsidering the capabilities and limitations of formal guidelines. In that sense, reform processes and policy steering are also influenced by expectations and models floating around worldwide, i.e. above the European level.

The three last articles within this issue focus in particular on how organisation models and technologies emerging at the global level are used in formulating the curriculum in new ways, thereby promoting processes of Europeanisation.. The first article, by Papanastasiou, addresses the dynamic interplay between contexts of governing and the manifestation of global scripts and methodologies in national curriculum reform. A critical discourse analysis of four key policy documents explores the National Curriculum in England as a governance technology of knowledge production. The curriculum is not considered as a product of the nation-state, but of interacting times and spaces which mirror European-wide interest in 'governance by comparison' which also belongs to a global paradigm. Within this interplay the distinctiveness of Europe is at risk of being lost.

In the second article, Philippou compares discourses on Europe in Greek-Cypriot policy, curricula and textbooks within the last two decades. According to Philippou, the reconstruction of history is no longer a common memory, but a selective one. By reporting on policy changes in the Republic of Cyprus, she sheds new light on the cultural imbalance in the historical narration of Hellenic and Turkish traditions within the current reform, concluding that ethno-national and state identities are rhetorically included, but substantially overlooked within state reform adjusted to EU policy. According to Philippou, Hellenocentrism and Eurocentrism seem to fuel each other, charging the Turkish-Cypriot identity to be a new element of multiculturalism rather than a founding historical element of Cypriot education. Thus, the reconstruction of history and culture is of major significance.

In the third article, Antunes seeks to interpret reasons behind the increased importance of curricular organisation and regulation principles. By drawing on examples from Europe, and specifically Portugal, she examines how the new policy frameworks provide categories for regulative control, motivated by the confluence of the Bologna and Copenhagen processes and the Education & Training 2010 Programme. Antunes considers the renewed interest in outcomes and competences in educational policy as part of a silent revolution, where the managerial agenda for change amplifies the space for marketisation and control in the educational sphere. Within this space, the distinct roles and interrelations between the teacher and the students turn into a blind spot, not illuminated by the reform documents.

While Philippou indicates that new standards-driven curricula are not capable of handling the differentiation of cultural traditions, and of alleviating existing tensions between ethno-national and state identities, Antunes points to the lack of educational orientation, where the focus on the relationship between the teachers and students is missing. Hence, one problem with new European policy is its generic character, which ignores the cultural and educational base for education and its 'site-specific' approaches in schools and classroom practices (Van den Akker, 2010, p. 180) Under any circumstances, curriculum will be a question about key actors' awareness of and sensitivity about common problems in education and how socio-cultural topics are taken care of in daily work. This question has not been seriously addressed with reference to the European research and policy space.

The way supra- or transnational policies express the significance of historical traditions, national cultures and civil rights is essential, for policy makers, experts, the academic research community and teachers in schools. Multicultural challenges demand certain cores or scripts which capture the diversity of world views, mind-sets and identities, but without losing sight of common horizons and problems. A possible resolution to problems within the diversity of fragmented societies calls for some basic common code, i.e. to be elaborated through curriculum deliberation (Englund, 2011), and which articulates a common interest in global challenges related to climate change, poverty, health and security. This stance calls for professional responsibility as well as joint attention towards transnational problems and questions.

The Back-door Strategy of Reform

Based on the articles in this special issue, it may be suggested that contemporary policy on competence in Europe works paradoxically and contradictorily. On the one hand, competence is promoted as transforming traditional thinking about teaching and assessment in education. This transformation, however, is not radical. On the other hand, new competence strategies presume new ways of ordering knowledge, which apprehend both the problem of translating standards into curriculum within local contexts, and of selecting knowledge for educational purposes.

There is hardly any doubt that even core concepts like 'qualification' within the seemingly consistent EQF framework may have ambiguous and even contradictory interpretations in the cultural repertoires of different European countries. And yet, the framework seems to work as a common frame for policy decisions and discourses across geographical and institutional borders (Alves et al, 2009, p. 151). How can that be? A possible diagnosis is that policies which are not directing attention to a particular core may actually work at the best on the political surface.

Articles within this issue suggest that tests systems and qualifications frameworks have some influence on schools by knocking on their back door. Rather than adopting European standards upfront as a tool for educational policy steering, national authorities implement new policy through expectations as a 'steering from behind strategy' (Lindblad & Popkewitz, 2004, p. 84; Segerholm, 2009). Such strategy calls for the alignment of curriculum and evaluation, which means that tools are partly complementary and partly mixed in their efforts to steer by governance and leadership in local school practices.

Almost all the articles within this special issue rely predominantly on documentary analysis. That is not unexpected but implies some limitations when it comes to exploring the interplay between globalising and Europeanisation policy and site-specific deliberations and choices in schools. Therefore, we might suggest that future studies on this theme might include a more varied methodological repertoire, and empirical approaches to analyse the trends, challenges and effects of Europeanisation on curriculum matters.

Despite this limitation, we conclude that the articles within this special issue do not confirm an overall European model for how knowledge should be selected for teaching in schools, and how responsibilities are going to be placed within national contexts. New policy is not so much about what should be done as what should be accomplished and achieved, which shapes new expectations for nations, professional agencies as well as teachers and students. Nevertheless, new frameworks and standards form expectations of the curriculum, not least dependent on how national actors, or others engaged in renewing the curriculum, interpret their roles and responsibilities.

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